

## REMARKS

The examiner requires a restriction to one of the following groups of claims:

Group A, species 1 — claims 3 – 8, 19 – 25 and 28;

Group A, species 2 — claims 3 – 8, 19 – 24, 28 and 31; and

Group B — claims 45 – 49.

As discussed below, the applicants respectfully traverse the restriction requirement on Group A, species 1, Group A, species 2 and Group B on the grounds that the examiner can search and examine the claims in each of these groups without serious burden. Although the applicants traverse the restriction requirement as discussed below, they provisionally elect to prosecute claims 3 – 8, 19 – 24, 28 and 31 of Group A, species 2 if the examiner does not withdraw the restriction requirement.

Independent claim 19 is generic to Group A, species 1 and Group A, species 2. Although the applicants assert that claim 19 is generic to the two groups, the applicants provisionally elect claims 3 – 8, 19 – 24, 28 and 31 directed to Group A, species 2 for prosecution in case the examiner does not allow claim 19.

According to MPEP §803, if the examiner can search and examine the application without serious burden, then he/she must examine the application on the merits even though it includes claims to independent or distinct inventions. As discussed below, because claims 3 – 8, 19 – 25, 28, 31 and 44 – 47 recite similar subject matter, the examiner can perform a single search and examination that will cover all of the claims. Consequently, the examiner can search and examine claims 3 – 8, 19 – 25, 28, 31 and 44 – 47 without serious burden, and therefore must examine these claims.

Because claim 19 recites a water vessel that includes an interface for coupling equipment, supplies and resources of a mission module, and a mounting structure for holding the mission module, and claim 44 recites a method that includes performing functions of the interface and the mounting structure, the examiner can perform a single

search for claims 3 – 8, 19 – 25, 28, 31 and 44 – 47. Furthermore, because these claims recite related subject matter, examination of these claims will involve similar analyses. Therefore, it is only slightly more burdensome for the examiner to search and examine claims 3 – 8, 19 – 25, 28, 31 and 44 – 47 than it would be to search and examine all the provisionally elected claims 3 – 8, 19 – 24, 28 and 31.

Consequently, because there is no serious burden on the examiner to search and examine claims 3 – 8, 19 – 25, 28, 31 and 44 – 47, the restriction is improper. Therefore, the examiner must withdraw the restriction on claims 3 – 8, 19 – 25, 28, 31 and 44 – 47 and examine these claims.

### CONCLUSION

The applicants respectfully request that the examiner withdraw the restriction requirement on claims 3 – 8, 19 – 25, 28, 31 and 44 – 47 and examine these claims.

If the examiner believes that a phone interview would be helpful, he is respectfully requested to contact the applicant's attorney, John M. Janeway, at (425) 455-5575.

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Respectfully submitted,

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